

# mary

*mother of socialism*

*a jubilee group anthology*

EDITED BY ANDY DELMEGE



## Contents

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A JUBILEE GROUP ANTHOLOGY

Edited by Andy Delmege

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# Notes on Contributors

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# Preface

~ Andy Delmege ~

It is a century since Thomas Hancock seized on the centrality of Mary for Christian socialism by dubbing the Magnificat "the hymn of universal social revolution". We offer this pamphlet as part of our struggle to fulfil and critically expand this legacy. It examines Marian theology, politics and spirituality from the points of view of feminism, Marxism and the scrutiny and recovery of tradition. Of particular importance at this time is Sister Vandana's profound meditation on the unity of work and prayer from the perspective of Indian culture, informed by Hinduism. The pamphlet also contains creative writing and poetry, using alternative forms of discourse to relate the whole of our common human experience to our theology, struggle and celebration.

There is much distortion of Mary in the world at present, ranging from attempts to use Our Lady of Walsingham to subjugate women to the use of Our Lady of Medjugorje to justify an ethnically cleansed Croatia. It is our hope that, by paying careful attention to what Mary actually says, this pamphlet will help in the struggle against this. There is much work to be done.

Our Lady of the Magnificat, Pray for us  
Our Lady Mother of Socialism, Pray for us

Andy Delmege  
November 1994

# How is it that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

*(Luke 1,43)*

~ Sue Dowell ~

We went to Rome last year. It was wonderful to wander and dream our way around that jewel-box city, to stumble upon its hidden treasures and find the familiar ones quite other than what we expected. It was not until it was nearly time to come home that I realised something was missing, something to do with Mary. Where was the Mary of the Magnificat? Why had so many of the city's great painters by-passed this wonderful scene?

Wondering if I had been particularly lazy or obtuse, I checked this out with an art historian friend on my return and was reliably informed that the Visitation is notably under-represented in Medieval and Renaissance art<sup>1</sup>. How, I wondered, can a story so deeply woven into the Christian story and into our liturgy be so neglected? And what does this neglect signify in terms of mariology?

All kinds of circumstances combine to give some stories prominence over others. We first have to ask who was telling them, when and for what purpose? This question applies to the very roots of our faith for we know that each of the four gospels was told as it was for a particular purpose and a particular readership.

This makes life particularly difficult for women since there are far fewer women's stories anyway and it is, by and large, men who have done the telling, and till very recently the bulk of reflection upon what was told. It has specific and particular implications for mariology since Mary is more than a main player in the Christian story: she is the saint above all others, that Christians are required to love, venerate<sup>2</sup> and, in women's case particularly, emulate. But she has frequently been (re)presented in terms which make this nigh impossible. The painful

sense of alienation many women experience has been addressed with consummate skill and eloquence by feminist scholars like Marina Warner, the title of whose widely acclaimed book *Alone of All Her Sex* neatly sums up the problem. How can one, wholly set apart from human femaleness, function as a model for female personhood?

So how has this isolation been perpetuated? 'Alone' holds two meanings - unique, without peer (which, if we choose so to believe, Mary is) and quite simply 'unaccompanied' (which she was not). The degree to which both have been suggested by the church's version of Mary hit me for the first time in Rome.

As Warner and others have shown, the classic double bind has been conveyed as much through visual images as through written exposition. To understand, and hopefully overcome, the 'problem' Mary presents we need to ask what part art has played in conveying Christian truth. Does the wondrous treasury of Christian art give us a true reflection of the faith as it has developed down the ages?

This is a tough one on several counts. For one thing the visual arts run even theology a close second in male domination: from the cave wall to the rich sweeping canvasses of the Old Masters (sic) we can see their work as reflecting and affecting contemporary notions of female grace and beauty. Mary is not exempt from this - as a short trip round any major art gallery will make clear - but in portraying her the artist's brush has also been guided by the more rigorous demands of faith and theology. And patronage: the most gifted artist cannot survive without it. The materials are costly and a painting has to be situated somewhere - a church or a private house at the express wish of whoever owns or is in charge of the same. Hence the artists' choice of subject matter can never have been entirely been their own.

These considerations did not weigh heavily upon the first Christians who expressed their wonder at God's work and world through word-images. But, given that all human societies have produced artists, given too the universal human curiosity about what people looked like, visual images were not ruled out altogether: one very early painting of Mary has been imputed to St Luke. However, the interaction of art and theology in Mary's early formation is hard to grasp because, such images as there were, have mostly been obliterated by the ravages of time, of war, and persecution as well as the deliberate destruction of the iconoclasts.



By the time a proper tradition of Christian art was established in fifth century Constantinople, it reflected a religious consciousness quite different to that of Christianity's origins in a persecuted Jewish sect. Important elements of mariology had already been laid down by this time; for example Mary's title *Theotokos*, God bearer, was established (amidst heated debate) in the 4th century. Byzantine art was both political and clerical, an instrument of state authority as well as a means towards religious discipline. Although there was no formal break in style between pagan and Christian art - indeed such a break was strongly resisted by a church which wished to stress its place as the official religion of a glorious and ancient civilisation - there was a distinct break in subject matter. The overriding purpose of Christian art was, as laid down by Gregory the Great, for the instruction for the illiterate in the Bible narrative. It was the story and the people in it that had to be told to a pagan world and this set important limits upon abstractions. It is interesting to note that the tradition of the hoary-headed, doddery old Joseph began during this period as the most effective way of demonstrating that he could not possibly have been the real dad!

It was not until the early 14th century that painted illustration swelled to a flood in the West covering much of the old with dazzling new images. The churches, chapels and museums of Europe today are filled with images of Mary in all the glory that she had gathered into her person over the preceding millennium. One would have to be the dourest ideologue or a philistine, or both, to deny the heart-stopping beauty and power of the paintings or indeed the mystic devotion Mary inspired in the church's most brilliant and holy men. But wonder is not the same thing as assent to what all these images, preached or painted 'say' to women. "Top that!" is how an agnostic friend put it the other day and there can be no doubt that these works speak ever more clearly of Mary's alone-ness, her isolation from other women. The message is, as always, inextricable from the medium. We have to ask who had charge over the creation of these great works of art and mysticism, under what social and political circumstances were they created?

The re-Christening of Europe after the Dark Ages had ensured the church's survival and attention could now be focussed upon increasing its cultural dominance and shoring up its own internal power structures.



As is well known it was her Virgin state that bound Mary ever more closely to the celibate elite who for centuries - the most formative period of Christian spiritual language - dictated the forms her worship took. Mary's virginity was subtly transformed from an affirmation that 'with God anything is possible' - into a negative evaluation of the bodiliness to which all others of her sex remained bound - a direction which the Eastern and Orthodox churches have by and large avoided.

Such an evaluation could only be made by screening out certain aspects of the scriptural narrative. For example, although the Gospel story implied that Mary, like all mothers needed to be purified after childbirth - a practice which did not derive from any moral distaste for sexual bodiliness - the feast that commemorated it twisted the Jewish rite into a celebration of Mary's virgin purity, so separating her from her own spiritual tradition. The artistic under-representation of key biblical scenes, like the Visitation, further suggests a deepening disengagement with Mary the 'ordinary Jewish girl' with Jewish family ties and obligations.

It is important to keep in mind, though, that we cannot now speak of 'Christian art' or 'Christian culture' in the singular. The 12th-14th century saw a deepening separation between contemplative religion - located in the church's celibate elite - and the piety practised by the ordinary faithful. One result of this is that devotional aids commissioned for use by the laity differed markedly in both style and subject matter from that of their spiritual mentors and masters. The office of our Lady (founded in 1205) and the exquisite Books of Hours which became popular among the aristocracy from the mid-13th century, were biblically based and accorded great importance to the birth narratives. As did the Mystery and Miracle plays, written and performed by and for 'the common people' to exhort them to 'good devotion and wholesome doctrine, but also for the commonwealth of the City'. All these forms seem to have militated against Mary's theological isolation by taking a more down-to-earth, truly incarnational understanding of her past and present role than that held by their monastic mentors and masters. And it really is necessary to stress that we are speaking of a male, celibate elite for recent scholarship has revealed that the *cult* of Mary is distinctly less marked in the texts of their female counterparts.<sup>3</sup>

An increasingly 'open marriage' between scriptural narrative and 'higher' marian speculation was in evidence by the 13th century. Extra biblical traditions like the story of Mary's own parentage, moved to centre stage at this time. This is a case in particular point here since the Immaculate Conception frequently replaced the Visitation in the Nativity Cycles.<sup>4</sup>

As 12th Century humanism ripened into early Renaissance, this openness was gradually extended to purely secular themes and subjects. The newly-recovered classical world opened up new vistas for Mary's devotees; cosmology gave her new habitations - the Moon at her head and the stars at her feet and she now took upon herself aspects and functions of the old goddesses. As intercessor, comforter and Queen she presided over the joys and afflictions of earthly life. With the rise of Romantic love in the later middle ages she also came to personify the goddesses' lighter aspect. Dr Pamela Tudor Craig gives a lovely example in her exposition of Botticelli's work<sup>5</sup>. She pointed out how closely Venus, the Goddess of love of this artist's famous *Primavera* (and to a lesser extent his portrait of the same goddess in *The Birth of Venus*) resembles, both in gesture and expression, the conventional Virgin of the Annunciation.

The altogether more human face Mary came to show from 12th century is often cited as evidence of an improvement in women's status. But, as we know - and feminism has been particularly concerned to demonstrate - the relationship between idealised womanhood and the value given to femaleness itself was ever a tenuous one. As Eleanor McLaughlin concludes, the 'roles' given to Mary in the divine plan by theologians, 'her actions, reactions and personality reflected the theologically supported popular misogyny of the medieval period'<sup>6</sup>. In other words Mary's appropriation of both sacred and secular womanhood did little to transform either sphere for the rest of us.

Paradoxically perhaps this situation was reinforced by the full-blown Renaissance humanism of the 16th Century. This was a time when 'realism' came fully into its own; whereas the job of the medieval painter had always been to point beyond this world towards the glory - or the perils - of the world to come, it was now permissible to portray the theme of 'man in society'. The relationship between artist and patron took on a new significance in the new demand for portraiture - likenesses - to immortalise a

particular individual, usually at a significant moment in his career. These were by no means secular works; such an idea was still unthinkable and the patron, now more likely to be an important layman than a cleric, would devoutly wish to record his devotion and gratitude to Mary. In Jan van Eyck's *Madonna and the Chancellor Rolin* for example, we see a full-size Chancellor kneeling, without any great distance between them, beside the Virgin telling her what he did in the office!

Again women, not having offices or great enterprises in the public world did not benefit from this more 'familiar' relationship. And we want and need to. She's Our Lady too, so why cannot we celebrate our own hidden experience of Mary, our sister and friend?

The time has clearly come to do this: we live in a culture in which women's friendships (and friendships in general) have been devalued, trivialised in all sorts of ways. As a Christian feminist I believe there are biblical resources to help us recover it. But before I come to that, a word on the story so far. As I see it, the most useful contribution feminism has made has been to expose the whole process by which mariology, along with other crucial elements of the faith have been made over by dualistic male-centred thought. As women in a male dominated world we have been on its underside; as a movement of educationally and socially privileged women we have been uniquely placed to observe and evaluate it. This is important because it is precisely the socially and historically mediated Mary that the church disregards or denies altogether. Right up until the present day each dogma about her has been presented as a 'discovery' of a great mystery only now - surprise, surprise! - 'revealed'.

But it is not enough to recognise the process; we need above all to change it. The real challenge for mariology is not to discern into which groups and causes she has been pressed into service - and replace them with more worthy ones - but to ask whether she should serve in this way at all. Mary was a woman who, we are told, pondered deeply on the events of her own life and so the way forward might be to let go our own needs and experience for a while and listen more attentively to hers. Which is what her biblical contemporaries did. Elizabeth, perhaps, above all. Just as the visitation has been under-represented by the artists so too is Elizabeth under-explored as a 'subject' of theology. But as the companion Mary herself sought out after the Annunciation, and as the

first to see what God has wrought in her cousin, it is she, perhaps above all, who can help us make sense of Mary's awesome and real uniqueness: 'Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb'. At the same time Elizabeth can heal Mary's un-real, imposed alone-ness for her recognition, her affirmation changes Mary's own perception of what has happened: her 'Let it Be' now becomes, Magnificat! And it is a shared joy and re-assurance that gave rise to this great song of praise and hope. At the moment of greeting Mary, Elizabeth too becomes 'filled with the Holy Spirit'. This is not just a story of sisterly solidarity - though it is most certainly that - it is a model of the kind of mutual ministry the Gospel teaches and church officially believes in. Mary needed Elizabeth and travelled in great haste, over a distance (calculated as some 80 miles) to be with her and stay with her for three months. We've been so busy mythologising and de-mythologising her that we have lost sight of the Mary who, like her son, proclaims her own vulnerability, her need of others. It is to this Mary, not the spotless Queen of Heaven, that countless women have gone for aid - and of all the fervent prayers for fruitfulness there must have been as many asking to be spared a scandalous or dangerous pregnancy.

And Elizabeth needed Mary. All the joys of womanhood, all that gave a woman any standing in her community had passed Elizabeth by. Who was going to even believe in her unlikely and highly dubious pregnancy? Lacking the benefit of hindsight or even of a *compos mentis* husband, it is no wonder that Elizabeth 'hid herself five months'. It is Mary who comes to her rescue. In Mary's presence, Elizabeth becomes joined to Hannah and all those prophet-bearing, miraculous birthing women of old and when these two are together past and present meet and the old song is taken up once more with a new strength, a new meaning. The child in Elizabeth's womb leaps at Mary's salutation and the new order begins.

And the context in which it does so really is important. When we detach the song from the singer, which we do in a number of ways from putting it in the mouths of sweet choirboys to treating Luke's birth narratives as a later addition and so surplus to requirements - and modern critics are far more guilty of this than ancient ones - we lose its subversive quality. We also lose something important about Mary herself. Many of the anti-feminists who evoke the aid of Mary

in their arguments write as if she never said another word after her 'Fiat'. (An example which popped up at the time of writing: explaining her 'repellence' for women priests in particular and Christian feminism in general, Mary Tuck tells us, of her convent schooldays, 'We knew Our Lady was a girl when she spoke those words: "Be it done to me according to thy word", *Tablet* 18.6.94). The suggestion - frequently made of late - that Mary can be a 'model for men' is predicated upon the same idealisation of female passivity and submissiveness. The qualities have not changed, it is just the idea that men take them on. While there can be no argument against that, the ideal is more often used to console than challenge, as was demonstrated in a sermon preached at Walsingham in 1994.

"As we come to understand more about the feminine, and as we seek to find its authentic expression in the Christian Church, there is nothing for us to fear. Marian devotion is the key to a right ordering of male and female. With Mary at the heart of the Church softening the structure, harmonising where there is conflict, there is hope."

Hope for what? I do not myself discern much softening or harmonising among some Walsingham fathers. Nor, more importantly, in the Magnificat which speaks of changing the structures of power for ever, not upending them or modifying them to take in 'new insights'. Mary rejoices in her unique vocation because she can help reveal what kind of god it is she is bearing. Luther, that great de-mythologizer, was more honest than most in expressing grave doubts about Mary's sinlessness because in the Magnificat 'she seemed to vaunt herself in a way inappropriate for a good Christian and certainly a good Christian woman'.<sup>7</sup> And if this makes her guilty of 'inappropriate behaviour' then Elizabeth, alone among biblical women, is witness to and complicit in that guilt.

As the heroine of the nativity, then, we need Elizabeth as much as we need Mary Magdalene, the heroine of the resurrection, who seems to be gathering all the feminist honours at present. Quite naturally so, for it is this Mary's crucial role of public witness that women are struggling to reclaim today and the recent furore over women priests shows how bloody a battle this can be. But Mary Magdalene's role

tends to be one of a counter-balance - 'the other Mary'. The church has actively encouraged the contrast. A long tradition of Western art has given us the figure of a repentant, but still lovely whore kneeling in tears at Jesus' feet - an image we now know to be false and to have somewhat obscured her significance as Jesus' friend and apostle to the apostles. But however beautifully and truthfully she is restored to it, her true place in the story must be that of younger, active discipleship.

Thus we need the Elizabeths, like the Annas (and Simeons) to represent those of us who are not destined to be a 'new woman-in-the church', who, like them are perhaps 'stricken in years' and whose 'authentic expression of the feminine' must be sought within the here and now of their own and the churches' life. This cannot mean standing quietly by and 'being like Mary' because Mary was not 'like' that. And the real Mary needs us all as companions and co-workers not as a 'counterbalance'.

The glory of the saints is that they are there for us at particular times in our lives, helping us weave our own stories into the story. We can seek their patronage in ways that are neither self-aggrandising, for it is their limitation we 'identify with': Thomas' doubts, Peter's impetuosity; nor subservient - for we choose those who struggled with and overcame these same limitations and so inspire us to do the same. But our adoptions are bound to be gender-based to some degree. We do not have to believe that women are essentially different from men in order to see that their experience of the world has been different and hence their temptations will also differ. The Gospel record itself implies that Jesus' male followers' expectations were too high and of the wrong kind and that the women's were often too timid. Like many young mothers, I once needed Martha's help to get my onerous housekeeping obligations in perspective. I need Elizabeth now for my own life as a menopausal middle age mum to be a means of grace and hope of glory.

I need her in a way that I do not (yet?) need St Anne who has had honours of a rather different kind heaped on her throughout the ages. I feel no Protestant fastidiousness towards the cult of St Anne: the interest in Mary's parentage which grew up around the 12th Century is eminently human (and at the time quite innocent of our modern impulse to absolutize the nuclear family). But there are important differences - psychological, social and even spiritual - between a cousinly and a parental relationship and these distinctions, these particularities of

relationships are the very stuff of incarnation. So it will not do, particularly in the case of women's stories of which there are few enough anyway, to substitute the one for the other. (That this really has happened is interestingly indicated by the disputed designation of Leonardo's famous cartoon in the National Gallery - the one we fought to keep in Britain some years ago, 'The Virgin and Child with the Infant John and St Anne' is the official title, but not the artist's own. The older woman is indeed Elizabeth, and Leonardo, being an artistic genius, knew Anne's presence in this calm familial scene would make another picture altogether. It did, and the Anne version can be seen in the Louvre.)

It is in the heart of the Nazareth household that we most commonly find Mary today, a re-location which began as early as the 16th Century, with the breakdown of the celibate system and the rise of the bourgeois family. In the new Holy Family, which quickly became a favourite theme of the painters, Joseph is restored to youth and vigour again, befitting his new role as head of the household. But the idealised housewife is no more accessible to most of us than was the idealised autonomous Virgin and seeking to make her so is simply to perpetuate the old process, to honour the experience of one (culturally dominant) group by diminishing another's. It is also profoundly unbiblical. We know full well that Mary herself received dismissive answers when she tried to assert a mother's authority over her son, and to give her an identify she herself learned to disclaim seems to me a real betrayal. It has also exposed her to a host of kitsch-merchants who would have scandalised most Christians down the ages.

So how can the Mother of our Lord come to us today? The most robust enduring forms of marian devotion seem to be those which have stayed close to the biblical narrative. In Anglican evensong and the mysteries of the Rosary we daily remember one who is not unaccompanied and for whom no one group has privileged access (the whole tedious question of 'family values' is beautifully ie unsentimentally and realistically resolved in the Rosary's Fifth Joyful Mystery, the finding of the child Jesus in the Temple. As every mother knows 'finding the child' is what really matters!)

Sticking with the biblical Mary is not to cut her down to size, to reduce her to Protestant Sunday School pieties as is often suggested; for the Bible is a truly artful book that invites, nay requires speculation.



Moreover the danger of re-mythologising Mary as a Goddess of one kind or another are considerable in this unbelieving age. As Warner points out, there are schools of thought that have nothing to do with the church but which happily accept the idea that 'the Virgin exists for all eternity. Under the influence of contemporary psychology, many people accept unquestioningly that the Virgin is an inevitable expression of the archetype of the Great Mother. Thus psychologists collude with and continue the church's operations on the mind'<sup>8</sup>. But in a way that is emptied of any historical particularity.

An important resource in my own Marian speculation has been drama. I have twice taken part in a cycle of the Mystery plays and getting to grips with the dialogues over a period of several months has been a joyful and humbling experience. There is a matchless sweetness, humour and vibrancy in these archaic words. And a consistently instructive engagement with past forms has come through my yearly task of creating a Nativity play with my parish Sunday School for our Crib service on Christmas Eve. Because it formed part of the liturgy, we were freed from the usual constraints - we did not have to provide the obligatory oohs and aahs for doting parents - and were able to do our own theology like the townspeople of old. The biggest hurdle was, predictably and always, to cure the pious pose of the young girl overwhelmed with the honour of 'being Mary that year' (an honour we took care to ensure fell once upon each and every one before she moved on from Sunday School). The Visitation helped enormously - Elizabeth provided someone to hug, to dance with, to make eye contact with. (The Byzantine artists knew all about that, no downcast or heavenward raised eyes for them. Their icons' Saints - painted to help people pray - meet those of the pray-er in a truly awesome gaze.)

But the best way, the only way, to get it right was for us to see Mary as a woman who had said yes, yes to Gabriel when she could have said 'No thanks'. (The Annunciation scene always improved immensely after playing out the no version!) And this is the key to Mary. She was a woman who made a particular historical option, both at the Annunciation and at the end of her life too. 'And Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart'. And after the sword's piercing, and out of all the joyful and sorrowful mysteries of her life came her

decision to throw in her lot with the community gathered in the Upper Room. For this too she is 'blessed among women'.

And blessed too are all those who travel that road with her 'for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord' (Luke 1, 45).

#### NOTES

Especial thanks to Dr. Pamela Tudor Craig (see below).

- 1 The Visitation is most commonly represented as part of a Nativity cycle. These were used to decorate nave walls which, along with the stained glass windows of ancient churches and Cathedrals were the part of the building designated as the people's bible. Giotto's Nativity cycle in the arena Chapel, Padua contains one of the most vivid and moving images of this distinctly under-represented subject. Giotto was a friend and devotee of St. Francis whose devotion to the Nativity is well known and who did so much to bring back the human and earthy aspects of the story. A powerful image of Elizabeth, painted in the 8th or 9th Century (hence Eastern in influence) can be seen in a niche in S Maria Antica in Rome where she is placed, with the Infant John the Baptist in her arms one side of the Virgin and Child. On the other side is placed St Anne with the child Mary in her arms. Was it sexism or ageism that in later times deemed one 'older mother' quite sufficient! It is interesting to note that Elizabeth is only included in the calendar of Saints as wife to Zachary whose place is owed to a (disputed) tradition of his martyrdom under Herod. Elizabeth was joined to his cult and the feast of both is November 5th.
- 2 Mary is accorded a unique place of worship - *hyperdulia*: a careful and useful distinction. Only God is owed *latria* (adoration) and the saints *dulia* (veneration).
- 3 See for example: Warner *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* Weidenfeld and Nicholson 1985, p.181.
- 4 The story of Joachim and Anna is derived from a compilation of the Golden Legend (13th Century) and the (Apocryphal) Book of James (6th Century).
- 5 Pamela Tudor-Craig and Richard Foster. *The Secret Life of Paintings* Boydell Press, 1986 (based on the BBC series screened in 1986, p.50. Dr Tudor Craig goes on to explain how this identification is derived from - and justified by - Plato's *Symposium*.
- 6 Eleanor McLaughlin *Women in Medieval Theology* in RR Ruether (ed) *Religion and Sexism* Simon and Schuster 1974. p.246.
- 7 RR Ruether *Mary: The Feminine Face of the Church* SCM Press 1979, p.3.
- 8 Marina Warner *Alone of All her Sex: the Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1976. Quartet Books Ltd. 1978, p.335.

# Motherly Love

~ Caroline Bailey ~

Tears blinded her as she walked down the path, words repeated themselves in her head, over and over, as fear seized her stomach, gripping it, twisting, digging in. How could he tell her such news so calmly, accept such a terrifying prospect so easily? Death. Soon and slow, he had said, his face strained, the muscles taut. Yet his eyes were quiet and calm. His only display of feeling came when she shouted and implored him not to give in to it, to fight, to take his life in his own hands, not to do what others told him but to fight to strengthen his body and his mind to withstand the pain and fear to come, but not to offer himself up like some bloody sacrifice.

His eyes had flashed, disturbed from their calm, irritated, annoyed. He hated her to presume upon his space, interfering in his life.

His anger was, as always, of the cold severe kind; he had never been one for explosions. He told her that he had come to a place where even a mother could not follow, where he must find his own way and face the darkness to come alone. So few people had taken this way before, in a way he had been chosen for this task as much as for any other part of the work he had done in his life. He had known for a long time that something like this was on its way. He had been preparing for it but only now did he have the courage to tell his mother, knowing how upset she would be and how much more difficult her tears made things.

She had re-lived that scene so many times and each time she cried for herself because she would have to watch her son suffer and would be left behind, with nothing she could do. Useless, when it came to the crunch she was useless. She cried for him, for the unfairness of a young life cut so short, for all the cliches so often heard before, for fear of what he would have to suffer, all the things he hadn't done, would never get chance to do now. Most of all though (and this is what made him angry) it was the shame of it all that bothered her - to

die in that way. A death fit for a criminal, an outcast, a homosexual. There she had said it. After all that was what he had shouted at her, what really bothered her the most. That this disease could never be just like any other, but carried with it silent accusations, rude stares, disgusted words, pitying pats on the shoulder. This was the hardest part to bear. The most unfair part - along with the sure promise of death she was forced to recognise the side of him she had always ignored, the side she had preferred to draw a veil over with the comforting phrase 'confirmed bachelor.' There was no way out now. Daily headlines screamed out at her. Gay disease, divine punishment, unnatural acts. And he didn't seem to care, just got angry with her and refused to explain himself.

Then the friends came, bringing food, staying the night when he needed it, being supportive, understanding, smiling, laughing, accepting while she could only look on from afar feeling anxious, useless, isolated by her own prejudice. She could hardly sleep at all at night and when sleep came it was fitful, restless punctuated by images of hospital beds, her son thin and gaunt, in pain and an embarrassment to polite society. She worried about the relatives and what to say when they asked about the favourite son. What is he doing these days? How is he? What exactly is it that's wrong with him?

All the time in her mind the questions why him? Why me? Why us?

The woman sits by a cot in a darkened room, her head bowed, her hands supporting her chin. The room is dim and the extra heating makes it stuffy. Occasionally the woman bends over to look at the child in the cot who is sleeping fitfully. Now and again the little boy, his damp hair clinging round his face, stirs and coughs. Each time, the woman takes a sharp intake of breath and places her hand on the child's forehead. Sometimes she almost cries, the tears welling up in her eyes but she stops them, grasping at her last bits of strength. She recalls the Doctor's advice that she stay and watch over him throughout the night and call him if the fever increases. She finds it hard to tell and has to stifle the desire to call the doctor every few minutes.

It is very late and the woman's eyes are heavy. For a brief moment she slips off to sleep, awakening with a jolt when the little boy wheezes again. She feels so angry with herself for not being able to

stay awake and suddenly scared that the boy might die and be taken away from her forever. Despair fills her heart and she feels she can't bear it any longer.

In the depths of her sadness she prays to a God she is not sure she believes in. She bargains. She prays that if her son lives she will do what she can to ensure that his life is used for something worthwhile, to help others, to create something good, even to serve God. In the black of this terrible night it seems the dawn will never come. Eventually, the strains of pink appear in the sky outside, and inside the room grows gradually lighter. As the daylight comes, the boy sleeps more peacefully and his fever seems to have died down.

The child lives. The woman feels differently about him after that terrible night. He is no longer hers, his life is no longer something to cling on to and possess. Now every day is a bonus, something unexpected, not demanded but given. He had lived when she had expected him to die.

Now years later she knows that he is going to die. She tries to remember the immense gratitude she had felt then. She knows she must recall it and hold onto it, that he is not hers, that every extra day he lives is to be appreciated. His death is a loss but not a robbery. He had never belonged to her anyway.

# The Politics of the Magnificat

~ Kenneth Leech ~

The Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, celebrated throughout most of the Christian world, is not a feast to arouse wild enthusiasm among English Christians.

Seen often as a polemical and divisive dogma, an ecumenical embarrassment, or arrogant assertion of papal claims in the pre-Vatican 2 atmosphere, the dogma is not widely seen as more than an irritant, at best a peripheral factor, at worst the most outrageous of the Marian heresies.

Yet in the Eastern churches this is Mary's feast *par excellence*, while Jung hailed the dogma as a sign of the restoration of the feminine dimension to the deity. Some feminist theologians such as Rosemary Ruether have pointed to the potentially liberating features of this and other Marian dogmas in an overwhelmingly male and cerebral Christian tradition. "Liberation Mariology" is certainly on the North American agenda.

Undoubtedly much Marian devotion has been based on a distortion of the Mary of the Magnificat, the prophetic woman who according to the Anglican Consultative Council in 1973, "praises the Lord for the radical changes in economic, political and social structures".

The late Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Marialis Cultus* (1974) also criticised the false Mary of corrupt piety, stressing that "Mary of Nazareth... was far from being a timidly submissive woman; on the contrary she was a woman who did not hesitate to proclaim that God vindicates the humble and oppressed, and removes the powerful people of the world from their privileged positions".

In fact, the dogma of the Assumption is a development of that of Resurrection. As Christ is the first fruits of the harvest of the dead, so his Mother, the God-bearer, is raised up to share in the risen life of the glorified Body of Christ. As in the Resurrection of Christ, so in the Assumption of Mary, it is the whole personality, the *soma*, which is raised.

The Assumption rejects the false dualism of body and soul which

still affects the Christian world: it is the whole person which is raised, just as it is the whole material creation which is to be transformed and share the freedom of the children of God (Rom 8).

Mary is thus the forerunner of the cosmic assumption of which Paul writes; she is the microcosm of the new and glorified creation. The dogma is in part an assertion of the materialistic basis of the Christian hope.

But the raising up of Mary represents also the exaltation of the poor, the *anawim*, God's little people. Small is not only beautiful; small is Queen of Heaven. It is this reversal of power structures which Mary predicts in her "hymn of the universal social revolution" (as Thomas Hancock called it).

God has looked lovingly on her humble state, her littleness, and as a result she will be *Makaria*, blessed. God puts down the *dunastas* and fills those in need. "It would be easy to over-spiritualise the meaning of these verses and ignore that literal interpretation", notes the evangelical scholar Howard Marshall. "The coming of the Kingdom of God should bring about a political and social revolution, bringing the ordinary life of mankind into line with the will of God."

The Assumption is also a pointer towards the recognition of the feminine dimension in God. Not in the sense that Mary is exalted to the status of a fourth person of the Trinity: but rather that, through the raising of this woman to share the divine nature, we should face the necessary consequence that womanhood, as much as manhood, is involved in that nature.

God is not male, and the 'motherhood of God' needs to be taken seriously. Marian devotion can only too easily be used as a safety-valve, a way of transferring the feminine dimension away from God to an idyllic, virginal creature. So we relate to Mary, while retaining the essentially male-dominated symbolism of deity.

There is much to be wrestled with before we can assert positively that Mariology is a potentially liberating tradition. But the place of Mary alongside her Son can hardly be questioned. As the late Fr. Raymond Raynes once said: "If Our Lady is not in heaven, where the hell is she?" The truth of the resurrection demands that, whatever else we say, we must at least say that Christ is in heaven and his Mother with him.

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# Poem of the Struggle of Peace

~ Anon ~

And Rob said he had to finish his rosary  
and sat on the grass with his hair falling in his eyes  
the police confused and his fingers sliding  
through the broken movement and dawn.

And the *Sun* says, Holy Spirit  
Turns Rosary Beads to Gold - myself  
I rocked back and forth in the cell and sang  
about who you can call by name.

But not only then and not only now it is the same  
at every anonymous moment of capture the holy spirit  
turns secrets to gold and I lick the syrup  
from bitten and guilty fingers, all  
the gorgeous sticky world.

Let us collide with the pavement and turn to sun.  
Let us be splinters under the law, let us sing  
in our positive guilt and our nameless prayers  
and our melted gold.

*This poem first appeared in 'Pinch of Salt' in February 1990*

# Hands of Mary

~ Vandana Mataji ~

Hands of Mary, offer me to your Son,  
That he and I through you, be made but one,  
One heart that beat: "Father Thy will be done".

Hands of Mary, offer me to your Son,  
That he and I, through you, be made but one.

When one loves it is the most natural thing to 'offer' something beautiful to the beloved. To the one we love best we will offer our very best gifts. Behind the gift, and what makes it really precious, is of course, the love of one's own heart. It is sure that God never sees the size of the gift, but the purity of the love with which it is offered. In the Bhagavad Gita Sri Krishna says:

"He who offers to me with devotion only a leaf, or a flower, or a fruit, or even a little water, this I accept from that yearning soul, because with a pure heart it was offered with love." (9.26)

It is with our 'hands' that we lay this gift at the feet of the Beloved.

This line "Hands of Mary, offer me to your Son" perhaps makes one think immediately of Mary lifting up her Son - her most precious possession - and offering him to God in the Temple, when he was forty days old. Here we ask her to offer us - also precious to her - to her Son, that through her, we may be united to Christ. With our hands we can touch, hold, love, lift, do, make, create. We can, through the work of our hands, participate in the creative activity of God.

We can offer "the work of our hands" - a Biblical phrase - through *Karma Yoga*. 'Yoga' means union, one-ing (*yuj* in Sanskrit, *jugum* in Latin means yoking). There are various *yogas* - ways of being united

to God. Thus *Jnaana Yoga* is the way of knowledge - associated with the head. *Bhakti Yoga* - the *maarga* (path) of loving devotion - associated with the heart. *Karma* (meaning 'work' here) is a yoga that unites us to God through our hands. *Raaja Yoga* - the king among yogas - is *Dhyaana* (meditation, or what the Christian West calls 'contemplation'). It does not matter which of the many 'yogas' we practise - according to our spiritual temperament. Any or all of them, if practised sincerely, can bring us into oneness with God.

One sometimes associates *Karma Yoga* with the beginning of one's spiritual life. But the longer I live, the more I see how difficult it is to practise this *yoga* truly. It demands death to oneself. In the Yogic tradition the young aspirant is made to begin with *Karma Yoga* because it is by far the best way for self-purification. How? Through *nishkaam karma* - selfless service which is nothing less than a daily dying to self. For it means seeking no fruits, results, success or praise for oneself. Now this - if you have sincerely tried it - is not easy. All of us at least implicitly seek success or some reward for our work and we justify ourselves by saying, "We are only human". This is why it is not an easy *yoga* to practise. Mary, needless to say, was adept at it. She learnt early enough to expect nothing.

In fact, precisely at the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple according to the law of Moses, she was warned by the old man Simeon, as he took the Child in his arms and sang his "Nunc Dimitis": "...a sword will pierce your own soul to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." This may have surprised the young mother, and may be it was yet another word uncomprehended, which she pondered in her heart often and which probably became really clear only at the end of her Son's life.

It sounds easy but in fact it is not, to offer God all our works "only for His Glory" and wholly through a "purity of intention". Two phrases often found on Catholic lips but very rarely practised in truth. One way of testing if what we really do is *Karma* "yoga" (or only "karma"!) is to see how we respond when our work has not been successful as we had hoped or when we have plainly failed - in spite of trying our best. Do we remain serene and smiling as we would have been had we succeeded gloriously? That indeed is true *Karma Yoga*. But if there is any sadness, frustration, disappointment, discouragement, then we have yet along way to go before we reach

the equilibrium that is *yoga*. "*Samatvam yoga uchyate*" (B. Gita 2.48). *Yoga* is equanimity. This is one of the many definitions of *yoga* in the Bhagavad Gita.

But this equanimity is only possible for one who loves God. Sri Krishna says to Arjuna: "Offer in thy heart all thy works to me, and see me as the End of thy love. Take refuge in the *yoga* of reason, and ever rest thy soul in me" (18.57) "Rest thy soul in me" reminds one of Our Lord's invitation to all "who labour and are heavily burdened" to come to Him "and I will refresh you, for my yoke is sweet and my burden light". For one who loves, no burden is too heavy.

How, in practice, can we form the habit of offering all our works in the spirit of Mary or of *yoga*? Sri Swami Chidanandaji gives us three very simple steps which he calls:

### Three points of a Complete Course of Saadhanaa

1. Before you begin any action imagine and try to feel that what you are about to do is a grand *bhajan* (hymn) of the Lord.
2. As you go on doing the work, every now and then try to feel that the work is not being done by you, that you are a mere instrument and it is the omnipresent power of the Lord that is working through you.
3. When you have finished the work, do so as an offering to the Lord. Let your last action be a whole-hearted arpanam (offering); Krishnarpanam/Christarpanam.

If we try to practise these three points:

- a devotional quasi-hymn of praise,
- a dip into one's depths where dwells the real Doer,
- a depositing of the deed at His feet which really says "the results are now in your hands", then all that we do will become *yoga*.

Mary surely worked like this, with love, seeking nothing for herself. She can be called the **Model** and **Mother** of *Karma Yoga*. Everything we do, small or big, can thus become an *arpanam* or an *archanam* - as 'offering' is called by Narada in his *Bhakti Sutra*. The Gita says:

"Whatever you do or eat or give or offer in adoration, let it be an offering to me, and whatever you suffer, suffer it for me."  
(Bhagavad Gita 9.22)

It is one of the forms of loving devotion. But the highest of all forms of *Bhakti* is *Prapatti* - total surrender.

**One heart that beats: “Father, Thy will be done”.**

When Mary offers me to her Son, she offers all of me - all I am, all I do. And she offers me with only one intention - that He and I become one. This is indeed the role of the Mother of the Lord. She does not come in the way of my union with Christ, as some Protestants used to think. On the contrary. She is the mediatrix, the means of union with Him.

Union or ‘oneing’ becomes total when one’s surrender is total: when one yields to God one’s every desire and thought, all one’s hopes and loves; when no shred of one’s being is left unoffered. Only then can one truly say as did Jesus in Gethsemane: “Not as I will, but as Thou wilt”. This complete *aatma-nivedanam* - (offering of the spirit) - is the meaning too of the last prayer Jesus made on the Cross: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”.

Such abandonment is what makes the mystics who are so madly in love with God mad enough not to be worldly-wise, but to trust in God for all their needs. “Here I am” - as Mary said when she uttered her “Ecce” to the angel. “Do with me, for me, in me, through me, whatsoever You want. I abandon myself to you”. This was a favourite prayer of a French saint, Madeleine Sophie Barat - foundress of the Society of the Sacred Heart. This is the spirit that can honestly say: “Father, Thy will be done”, not occasionally, nor when one happens to be reciting the ‘Our Father’, but every moment of every day. For at each moment one knows God gives us only the very best thing for us; He could never give the second-best. And at every moment He, as our master, gives us the grace to live that moment. One moment, one day at a time; never two at a time. “Give us this day, our daily bread”, Jesus taught us to pray.

Another ‘Marian’ woman from Bengal, also called Maa - Mother - Maa Aanandamayee (Mother full of bliss) taught this supreme *saadhanaa* as a means of constant union of bliss:

**“If moment by moment you welcome existence such as it is, as the Grace of the *Guru* at work, I promise you that you will reach your**

Goal soon. No **one** *yoga* or *saadhanaa* is more efficacious than another. What matters truly is the time you allot to it. How can one consecrate **all** one's time to *saadhanaa*?

Learn to see and accept **all** that comes to you as *Guru-kripa* (the grace of the *Guru*), as a challenge or an opportunity. Hence this difficulty, this fatigue, this anxiety, this bad news, this contradiction, this joy, this beauty, all are the means of *saadhanaa*".

To be "one heart" with God can be understood in various ways according to the path or *yoga* one is treading.

For a *bhakta*, this union will be usually that of a lover with her Beloved. The soul - always feminine to God - is 'oned' with Him in a close embrace, but the two remain distinct. As Sant Tukaram, the poet-saint of Maharashtra put it, "I like to taste sugar; I do not want to become sugar". Most Christians - especially the traditional ones - think of union with God on these lines. One fairly recent instance is the Roman document sent by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith: Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some Aspects of Christian Meditation. Here it is insisted upon that the Creator-creature distinction must always be kept, and a warning sounded to the West as well as to the East: "Within the Church, in legitimate search for new methods of meditation, it must always be borne in mind that the essential element of authentic Christian prayer is the meeting of two freedoms, the infinite freedom of God with the finite freedom of man". Christian prayer is "defined properly speaking as a personal, intimate and profound dialogue between man and God".

This 'dialogue' however, is one form of 'prayer'; it is not 'meditation' which implies silence of thought. Besides, even in the Christian tradition, there have been *bhaktas*, saints and mystics, who have spoken of becoming so 'one' that one's finite freedom disappears into the infinite freedom of God.

*Shankaraachaarya* speaks of three stages of *bhakti*. The first is the above - where the creature and the Creator are seen as remaining distinct. The second is like the tree and the creeper - a little as Our Lord put it: "I am the Vine; you are the branches". The third stage is like the drop of water in the river. It is interesting that St Teresa of

Avila, Catherine of Sienna and other woman saints, have spoken in like manner.

God is Infinite, and infinite are His ways of loving. "In any way that people love me in that same way they find my love: for many are the paths, but they all in the end come to me." (Bhagavad Gita 4.11) Or as another translation put it: "Those centred on me, full of me (*manmaya*), accede to my own mode of being". The Upanishads, as well as the Fathers of the Eastern church say, "we **become** what we meditate". And "God became man so that man (humankind) may become God". (Simon the New Theologian - and other early Fathers).

One heart that beats: "Father, Thy will be done", could mean any one of these three modes of loving union. Our collaboration with the Divine action is never really 'creativity'; it is disposability, availability, adhesion, waiting, surrendering, a total Yes - Fiat - OM! Being passive, feminine! The oneing, yoking, *yoga* is really done by the Only Doer - God.

*This article is an extract from the book "And the Mother of Jesus was there" by Vandana Mataji, Jeevan Dhara Society, 1991. Copies of the book may be obtained from 58 Heavitree Road, Exeter EX1 2LQ*



# The Magnificat

## *A Christian Manifesto?*

~ Graham Dowell ~

There is a story of one Rabbi Menahem who had to respond to a crazy man announcing the liberation of Israel from the top of a mountain. As the self-styled prophet blew on his trumpet the people all thought this spelt freedom. Not so Rabbi Menahem. He went to his window, opened it and looked at the world outside. Sadly he muttered: "What I see is no renewal". If Christians are ever tempted to indulge in triumphalism, they need only open their windows and look out on a world that bears the marks of Christ's Passion, certainly, but few signs of his Resurrection and Paschal Victory.

At first sight, Mary's Magnificat seems all too triumphalist, almost too good to be true<sup>1</sup>. It has been called a 'Christian Manifesto', 'a public declaration...making known past actions and motives of action announced as forthcoming' (OED). The hope - of the Kingdom, God's New Deal for the poor and oppressed, the Anawim or Poor Ones of Israel - is rooted in the historical experience of Exodus, Exile and Restoration. Mary's faith is Abrahamic and is presented by Luke as the model for Christian believers who look for solid ground for the hope that is in them. True, the signs of God's saving action in the here-and-now can only be perceived by the eye of faith; in themselves they are ambiguous and ambivalent, as we see in the opposing interpretations of those 'false prophets' attacked by Jeremiah who 'cry peace where there is no peace'.

We may compare this with Luke's record of Jesus' own opening Manifesto, proclaimed in his first sermon at his home town of Nazareth (4, 16-30). Quoting Isaiah 61, he announces the dawn of a new era - liberation, healing, 'good news to the poor', a Jubilee Year. General applause from his audience rapidly turns to fury when the preacher hints that it is not all good news for the privileged and that Gentiles also are expected to benefit. In fact, it is almost the end, not the beginning of the story, and Jesus narrowly escapes being lynched. He has come to 'his own' and they have thrown him out.

We may also compare it with that other celebrated Manifesto which

has in some sense helped to change the course of history, Karl Marx's Communist Manifesto. Although Engels certainly assisted in its production it is largely the work of Marx himself. Appearing first in 1848, in German, it passed almost unnoticed and only later, refined, expanded and passing through numerous editions, was seen to contain the essential doctrines of the movement and became the sacred text for millions of adherents. If we select some of its major themes I suggest that some interesting similarities and contrasts with Luke's 'Christian Manifesto' emerge:-

#### MARY'S MAGNIFICAT

1. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord: rejoice, my spirit, in God my Saviour.
2. So tenderly has he looked upon his servant, humble as she is.
3. For, from this day forth, all generations will count me blessed.
4. So wonderfully has he dealt with me, the Lord, the Mighty One.

#### MARX'S MANIFESTO

We proclaim the new social gospel. Our task is to win the battle of democracy; the free development of each must be the condition for the free development of all.

The proletariat have overcome their impotence and pauperism and seized the commanding heights of national economies.

The history of all existing society is the history of class struggles. Today, all European powers acknowledge the power of Communism.

We have established the community of women, who are no longer mere instruments of production, or prostitutes exploited by the bourgeoisie. We have stopped the exploitation of children and replaced home education by social education.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 5. His name is Holy; his mercy sure from generation to generation toward those who fear him.         | We have rescued the people from exploitation, the self-interest and cash values of the bourgeoisie, and restored workers' self-worth.  |
| 6. The deeds his own right arm has done disclose his might.  | Whereas Christian Socialism is but the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart-burnings of the aristocrat, we have established true freedom, equality and fraternity. |
| 7. The arrogant of heart and mind he has put to rout.  | We have released the powers of Nature and put them at the service of men. We have applied all rents of land to public purposes and abolished all right of inheritance.               |
| 8. He has torn imperial powers from their thrones, but the humble have been lifted high.             | We have brought waste-lands into cultivation and established communes, state farms and collectives.  |
| 9. The hungry he has satisfied with good things, the rich sent away empty.                           | We have distributed the population equally throughout the country and centralized all credit in the hands of the State.  |
| 10. He has ranged himself at the side of Israel his servant; firm in his promise to our forefathers. | We have deprived the bourgeoisie of their power to subjugate the labour of others in the interests of profit.  |
| 11. He has not forgotten to show mercy to Abraham and his children's children, for ever.             | We have fulfilled the aspirations of Owenites, Chartists and Reformists, and overcome national differences and antagonisms between peoples and classes.                              |

(1) Given the vastly different tone and purpose of the two documents, both are productions of tiny movements which make astonishing claims to changing the course of history and the destiny of nations - 'turning the world upside down'. The one claims the victory of the God of Abraham, the other the inevitable tide of history. But the tiny mustard seed was in the former case twelve men and a handful of women: in the latter, 'the Communist League' which was largely the creation of, and the cover for, two men, Marx and Engels, in 1847/8.<sup>2</sup>

We do not know precisely the target readership Luke had in mind; most probably it was meant for use by preachers and missionaries to the Gentile world, rather than private readers like 'most excellent Theophilus', who may anyway be not a particular person but a representative 'god-fearer'. Marx, like Luke, clearly wanted to refute some of the false impressions of the new movement and 'meet this nursery tale of the Spectre of Communism with a Manifesto of the party itself'. His was designed to be a rallying cry for the oppressed and to silence the rumours circulated by the ruling classes: "Workers of all countries, Unite!"

(2) Both writers seek to place their Manifestos in a historical context; they emerge from a recognisable chrysalis. Luke clearly uses the model of Hannah's Song of Praise for the birth of the prophet Samuel (1 Sam. 2,1-10). At the end of the Birth-Narrative he even specifically quotes 1 Sam. 2,26: "And the child Samuel grew on and was in favour with the Lord and also with men", as if to underline the Jewish salvation-history on which his own is based. So close is the association that Mary's mother was widely believed to be called Anna (= Hannah).

Mary is depicted as setting her personal destiny against the backcloth of God's protection of his people down the ages. The recurrent use of the perfect tense throughout the poem conveys the certainty that these are the permanent characteristics of God - the way things are in the Kingdom: this is the rock-solid platform from which the new movement is to be launched. A pious Jewess would have been as familiar as Jesus himself with the language of the Psalms where 'scattering God's enemies', feeding the hungry and caring for the poor are recurring themes which are picked up again in Jesus's first sermon at Nazareth.

Marx also uses the perfect tense even though the 'victory' he proclaims can only be a prospective, ideological one and hardly more visible than that of the tiny Judaeo-Christian movement. The majestic sweep from ancient Rome, through the feudal systems and the emergence of modern bourgeois society is seen as a 'preparatio evangelica' for the victory of True Democracy. The contribution of other movements - Owenites, Chartists, Reformists etc. - is generously acknowledged, as is the witness of Israel, the Servant People, in Mary's Magnificat. Marx would have imbibed the eschatological language of Jewish culture: the concept of the end-time, Messianic judgement and fulfilment.

Luke was sufficiently concerned with history to contribute one of his own: 'to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished', as he says, 'in an orderly account'. But his concern was still a theological one, and his primary purpose (as we have said) to further the Gentile mission. So he quarries from the Old Testament the themes with which to paint his grand design of salvation-history. His triumphant sweep is as selective and optimistic as Marx's. His idealized picture of early Christian communities and their experiments in common ownership (Acts 2, 42-47; 4, 32-35) may seem to us Utopian. So does Marx's 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all' - and as vulnerable to subsequent distortions and disappointments. But the fact that early enthusiasm was quenched by the bureaucrats and commissars that took over does not obscure or vitiate the original vision. Brother Elias could not extinguish the power of St. Francis' witness to Gospel poverty and simplicity; nor could the Emperor Constantine or Secretary Stalin destroy the vision, idealism and enthusiasm of the early pioneers.<sup>3</sup>

Luke's special concern for the 'poor'/underclass and for the particular contribution of women is clearly reflected in the Magnificat. It is echoed in his Beatitudes (6, 20-22) where the Kingdom belongs to the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful and the persecuted. The comfortable, well-fed and successful are the targets of the terrible Woes (6, 24-26). The 'rich' are condemned not so much for their oppression of the 'poor', but for their complacency and reliance on material well-being and indifference to the sufferings of the underprivileged. Contemporary apocalyptic writers voiced the

same criticism; for example 1 Enoch 94,8: "Woe to you rich, for you have trusted in your riches, and from your riches you shall depart; because you have not remembered the Most High in the days of your riches."<sup>4</sup> Equally reprehensible, the worldly and well-to-do had made their accommodation with heathenism; the poor, in contrast were those who had stayed loyal to their faith and 'accepted God's will as the only rule in their lives'.

There is nothing particularly original in the Magnificat's reversal of fortunes. Mary might be quoting Psalm 18 with the parallelism characteristic of Hebrew poetry: "For thou wilt save the afflicted people; but the haughty eyes thou wilt bring down." What is remarkable in Luke's Gospel is his particular dislike of wealth itself and the danger it brings in substituting worldly pleasure for lasting joy and the true satisfaction of 'Blessedness' (not to be equated, as in the Jerusalem Bible, with mere 'happiness'). He alone records the Parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus (16, 19-31), for which there are parallels in Jewish and Egyptian sources, itself an excellent illustration of his earlier 'Woes'. The rich man is condemned for making the wrong choices: the poor man is consoled because he had been in his life incapable of making any choices at all. It is perhaps significant that he alone of all the characters in the parables is given a name, Lazarus, to denote that he has not lost that most precious of all possessions, his human identity.

Marx would no doubt have thoroughly approved the targeting of the story at the prosperous bourgeoisie of the day, the Sadducean party: their teachings, according to the historian Josephus, 'attracted none but the rich' and 'those of the greatest dignity'. In fact, Marx called England 'this land of Mammon': in his eyes, to worship Mammon was to make a fetish, a be-all-and-end-all of money-making; it was what Paul called 'covetousness which is idolatry' (Col. 3,5; Eph. 5,5). He would not have been surprised to find the cult of Mammon enshrined in its contemporary monuments, Canary Wharf and the Nat West Building at the heart of the City, and the nation of shoppers worshipping in their shining supermarket Cathedrals.

He was the first of many since (including our own RH Tawney) to see the close connection between Puritanism, Protestantism and money-making. "The cult of money", he says, "has its asceticism,

its self-denial, its self-sacrifice - the chase after the eternal treasure". "The hoarder makes a sacrifice of the lusts of the flesh to his gold-fetish." "The capitalist system is essentially the institutionalization of the idolatrous worship of Mammon". In one of his early writings he finds an illustration of two particular properties of money in Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*: (1)'It is the visible divinity, the transformation of all human and natural qualities into their opposites, the universal confusion and inversion of things; it brings together impossibilities. (2) It is the universal whore, the universal pimp of men and peoples.'<sup>6</sup>

It is surely significant how largely money - its possession, sharing and renunciation - figures in Luke's account of the early Christian Church. It may be misleading to present the common life of those early Christians as a form of communism; but he does state twice (Acts 2,44; 4,32) that they held everything in common. It is the refusal of Annas and his wife Sapphira to share their profits from the sale of land with the rest of the community that leads to their appalling fate (Acts 5, 1-12). It is the inability of the Rich Official (Luke 18, 18-30 = Mark 10, 17-31) to separate his quite sincere desire to lead a good and upright life from the demands of the Kingdom to forego the good in order to embrace the best. Peter's startled, incredulous reaction would sum up the sentiments of many of Luke's readers: is total renunciation of possessions required of a disciple? If so, is there any hope for the vast majority of us? Must wealth and possessions, private property, be synonymous with godlessness, a permanent barrier to complete surrender to God's will and the demands of the Kingdom?

Marx's manifesto required the bourgeoisie, the existing owner of property, to disgorge in favour of the nine-tenths who, in his day, owned none: the monopoly of a restricted class had first to be broken. But there was to be no embargo on private property itself - only its restriction to a tenth of the population. The hungry would be filled with good things and the bourgeoisie sent, if not empty away, considerably slimmed down. Compared with Marx's, the Magnificat Manifesto, the common life of the early Christians, followed pre-eminently by the Franciscans and the dangerous stance of Lollards and Levellers, seem radical indeed. Small wonder, perhaps, that the clarion-call of the Magnificat, the absolutism of the Beatitudes and the harsh strictures on wealth and property have been castrated and



'spiritualized' by a Church which has historically been subjected to the Babylonish Captivity of a bourgeois Establishment!

A similar fate awaited the Communist Manifesto. Lenin thought little about 'feeding the hungry with good things'. For him, famine provided an opportunity to revolutionise the peasants. 'Psychologically', he wrote, 'this talk of feeding the starving is nothing but an expression of the saccharine-sweet sentimentality so characteristic of our intelligentsia.' Unfortunately, the rural proletariat showed themselves unwilling to be organised into the 'independent class party' that Lenin hoped for. Social welfare was on a par with religious faith which he called (sharpening Marx's celebrated critique) 'a kind of spiritual gin in which the slaves of capital drown their human shape and their claims to any decent life.' As Gorki noted, Lenin 'has no pity for the mass of the people...The working classes are to Lenin what minerals are to the metallurgist.'

Given the failure of the Church qua institution to live out the ideals of Magnificat; given also the relegation of the Marxist Manifesto and Mao's Little Red Book to the library shelves, we may ask what is their true and lasting purpose today. Do they simply witness to the Vanity of Human Wishes and the fragility of a dream which still waits to be redeemed? Can they still inspire, renew and direct in the ways their composers perhaps intended? Or must we acknowledge sadly that Mary's song belongs more to liturgy and the poetical imagination than to the harsh world of realpolitik; and that Marx's call to revolutionary action must be silenced by the resounding failures of state socialism and the siren blandishments of market capitalism?

Their importance today, I would suggest, is two-fold. Firstly, they act as historical benchmarks, foundation-stones for the new order of justice and shalom. But as springboards rather than monuments. Secondly, they remind us of at least the possibility of change and renewal. Like Utopias, they whisper that things need not be as they are or always were; there is no law of Medes and the Persians implacably inscribed on the status quo - things might actually be different. As Browning said,

*Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,  
Or what's a heaven for?*

- or a Utopia?

With the Magnificat, unlike the Manifesto, aesthetics have tended to overshadow the meaning of the story, which is more theological than historical. The beauty of the Birth-Narrative has overlaid the starkness of the message:

The news is conveyed to those who most need it - illiterate peasants

The medium of the message is an unmarried mother, a disadvantaged, second-class citizen

The scandal at the end of the story, a criminal's death, is reflected in the scandal at the beginning

Poverty and rejection mark Jesus' ministry from the outset

Like the Beatitudes, it looks for a radical overturning of the world's priorities

Happiness and fulfilment are not to be measured by success, nor is power by status, privilege and social acceptance

It presents a basic text for Liberation Theology and as such is appropriately sung by a woman

"Christianity, it is said, brought hope and consolation to the slaves of the Roman empire", writes AJP Taylor. "Marxism did much the same for the wage slaves of capitalism and indeed went one better. They did not need to wait for the next world. The Communist Manifesto assured them that they would win in this one"<sup>8</sup>

In fact, the Magnificat is very much concerned with this life. It celebrates life as a gift: the supreme gift of new, liberated life. It is a prayer of gratitude and an invitation to participate in eschatological joy: the future belongs to the hungry and exploited. As all life is gift (Blake's 'everything that lives is holy'), so is the gift of every child. All babies are special, but this one is Special with a capital 'S'. There has been an intimation of this - a clear

signal which we know as Annunciation. So this prayer is no isolated event. It emerges out of a background of oppression and messianic hope. Like that other inflammatory document, the Book of Revelation, addressed to a hard-pressed community, wrestling with enemies without and schisms within, it celebrates the imminence of a "New Heaven and a New Earth". As the Jewish people looked back to Exodus and their experience of Liberation, so Mary sees in the child's birth a clear sign that God still keeps his promises and the faith of his people is justified.

Nor is the content of the prayer confined to this event or Mary's personal situation: she acts as a mouthpiece, representing all Jewish mothers and her whole oppressed people, as the Psalmists did before her. Like Luke's other Canticles, the Benedictus and Nunc Dimittis, the Magnificat is a mosaic of Old Testament texts. She echoes the words of Leah: 'For all women will call me blessed' (Gen. 30, 13). Particularity (her pregnancy) is a foretaste of universality ('throughout all generations'). It is as if the griefs of all the ages, the pent-up yearnings for a reversal of the people's fortunes, pour forth in a pæan of praise. This child is not just to be a personal blessing to her; he will put the Herods and Commissars in their place. In this poem the personal is political, and its reverberations are structural as well as spiritual. In the words of Fred Kaan's hymn:

*Sing we a song of high revolt...  
He calls us to revolt and fight  
With him for what is just and right;  
To sing and live Magnificat  
In crowded street and council flat.<sup>9</sup>*

In the end, the value of the Magnificat is, like the person of Mary herself, largely symbolic. It acts as a hinge, linking the prophetic demands for justice (zedek) with Jesus' own Manifesto in Luke 4, where he sets out his plan of action and proclaims his own embodiment of 'The Kingdom'. Both represent 'good news to the poor' and both are firmly based on Old Testament models. The Magnificat represents the cry of the oppressed for some reversal of their historical predicament: a revival of the prophets' attack on the status quo where all the odds are stacked against the 'anawim' or underclass.

Like Marx's Manifesto it seems to us a little unreal, Utopian or Atopian, in that its vision is not rooted in any visible reality. Like Rabbi Menahem we look out and mutter: "What I see is no renewal". It isn't our experience that hunger - even the hunger for truth, meaning, some sense of self-worth - is alleviated in today's world; if anything, the reverse. We don't find the power-hungry disabused of their illusions of grandeur. As the gap between rich and poor grows wider (between employed and unemployed, North and South, etc.), the only 'emptiness' we perceive in the affluent is the vacuum left by a loss of purpose and direction, the dissatisfactions of limitless acquisitiveness, a pathetic whimper of discontent: 'Surely there must be something more - a better song to sing?'

There is - and its name is Magnificat. We may feel we are singing it like those exiles and aliens by the water of Babylon, 'singing the Lord's song in a strange land'. The culture of grab and greed may not give much breathing-space for dreams of daily bread for all. But it is still better to light this particular candle than to curse the darkness: we need our dreams and our Utopias. As the German liberation theologian and peace-worker, Dorothee Soelle, writes:

"Perhaps the mild cynicism of our culture is the best deterrent against this ability to believe and imagine, this loving and acting that seeks more in life than we already have. Nevertheless, the deterrent will not function for everyone and certainly not forever. There is something ineradicable about faith, hope and love. One may criticise the anthropology of previous socialism for being too optimistic. However, the cynical anthropology of real existing capitalism is unbearable for the spiritually gifted. Present reality is not everything! A transcendence stirs within us that cannot be satisfied. Even an economically stable capitalism will not smother this stirring. For God wants to believe in us, to hope in us, and to become one with us in love."<sup>10</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Some attribute the hymn to Elizabeth, though the weight of MSS is heavily against this. Its origin is obscure; if Luke composed it (he alone records it), it doesn't bear many marks of his style. Probably, following RE Brown and CF Evans, we should place its origin in 'a Jewish Christian community of the Anawim or Poor Ones'. (*TPI Commentary*, SCM, 1990, p.173.)
- 2 In their Preface to the German edition of 1872, Marx and Engels assert it was commissioned by the Communist League at its London Congress in 1847. A.J.P. Taylor comment that 'the Communist League was itself the creation, more or less imaginary, of Marx and Engels'. See his Penguin Ed. of the Manifesto, 1967, Note 1, p.123.
- 3 This is probably unfair to the Papacy and the successors of Francis who while acknowledging the originality and prophetic quality of the Franciscan movement, could not call themselves 'Franciscans'. If the Poverello's Manifesto was his Rule (with the Canticle of the Sun?), who were its true inheritors. No, surely, the Fraticelli, who rejected the compromises of Rome and soon became a fanatical and ferocious rump; but those like St. Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, Roger Bacon and those who have tried to absorb the spirit of Francis and live out his version of 'Justice, Peace and the Integrity of all Creation'.
- 4 See CF Evans, *TPI Commentary*, p.333.
- 5 But not, thankfully, in RSV or NEB. CF Evans comments that the word 'makarios' 'was originally in Greek applied to the gods, whose life was untroubled by care and death, and then to men (sic) in so far as they could share that life' (op. cit. p.328).
- 6 See his *Early Writings*, New York Vintage Books, 1975, p/b ed. p.377. See also Jose Miranda, *Marx Against the Marxists*, SCM, 1978, esp. Ch. 8, 'The Gospel Roots of Marx's Thought'. Miranda believes, unfashionably, that at the height of his maturity Marx was a Christian and believed in God. But he also believes that the interpretation of Christianity as a religion - the re-absorption of Christianity by the framework of religion - has been 'the most radical falsification ever perpetrated in history' (ib.pp.224,262).
- 7 For Lenin's attitude towards the lumpen-peasantry see his Proletariat and Peasantry, *Collected Works Vol. 7*, p.158. 'Critics of Lenin are entitled to say that in the long run his principle of the centralised party and its 'vanguard' role meant that his revolution could no longer be described in the Marxist categories, and amounted to the substitution for the old regime of the rule not of the working class but of a political and bureaucratic elite.' (Robert Conquest, *Lenin*, Fontana, 1972, p.124).
- 8 Op. cit. Introduction p. 36.
- 9 *100 Hymns for Today*, No. 86.
- 10 *On Earth as in Heaven*, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993, p.64.

# Annunciation - for Huw

~ Sara Maitland ~

There was a silence at His conception,  
as dark and deep as night itself;  
a silence never heard before.  
No thrashing limbs, no gentle moans,  
No grunts, no tender words, no laughs,  
no murmuring, turning, lapping tongues.  
No "Ah"; no "Oh"; no "Yes" nor "No".  
No "Now"; no "Please"; no "more"; no "wait."  
No panting, thrusting, rising sounds,  
No sigh,  
No high, triumphant cry.  
No pain, no joy.

There was a silence at His conception  
as dark and deep as night itself.  
And in that silent night you walked -  
as bright, as quiet, as distant as a star - and shone,  
shone silent in the silent dark.  
Alone and shining, silently, you took the child who made the dark  
into the silent dark inside yourself.

In pregnancy, when the sun is bright,  
they say the stretched skin lets in light.  
I know it does not let it out again.  
For me, if not for you,  
it was a dark place where He grew.

# Dancing the Magnificat

~ John R Orens ~

From the time he became Bishop of London in 1868 until his death seventeen years later, John Jackson was beset by unruly clergy. In parishes across the diocese, especially in the poverty-stricken East End, Anglo-Catholic ritualists were busy reviving the ceremonial practices of the pre-Reformation Church despite the opposition of their bishop, Parliament, and even their own riotous parishioners. There were demonstrations, criminal prosecutions for violation of the Public Worship Regulation Act, and occasional imprisonments: all bewildering to the moderate Evangelical who presided over this unseemly tumult.

But no self-professed Catholic caused Bishop Jackson more grief than Stewart Duckworth Headlam (1847-1924). While yet a deacon, Headlam had been forced from his first cure for preaching the doctrine of universal salvation. Jackson had reluctantly ordained him to the priesthood only to find the young man embroiled in controversy yet again. As curate of St. Matthew's, Bethnal Green, Headlam filled his sermons with fiery denunciations of class privilege. He consorted openly with notorious atheists. He encouraged the youth of his parish to frequent theatres and music halls. And then, as if to add insult to injury, he justified his radicalism by appealing to the Catholic faith. Not surprisingly, within a few years Headlam was once again expelled by his incumbent and excoriated by his bishop.

Eventually he secured a position in the humble East End parish of St. Thomas', Charterhouse. But Jackson remained suspicious and peppered the vicar, John Rodgers, with questions about Headlam's conduct and his orthodoxy. Once, in a moment of particular frustration, Jackson asked if Headlam believed in the divinity of our Lord to which Rodgers replied playfully, "Of course he does, and I think he believes in the divinity of Our Lady also."<sup>1</sup> Needless to say,

this answer did not please the bishop. Nor could Jackson have been reassured by Headlam's bold proclamation that "to this generation ...is entrusted the glorious task of restoring to the English Church a real reverence for the Blessed Virgin Mary."<sup>2</sup> But what seems to have most troubled Jackson was the suspicion that Headlam's conception of divinity, Christ's as well as Mary's, was different from nearly everyone else's, and in this the bishop was probably right.

Headlam had come to Catholic Christianity not by way of the Tractarians, but through the ardently incarnational theology of Frederick Denison Maurice. From Maurice, Headlam had learned to revere the Church and her sacraments as much as any child of the Oxford Movement. But Maurice also taught that the Incarnation has established an indissoluble union between God and the whole human race, binding us together and raising all our faculties and aspirations into the mystery of the Godhead. This vision of common redemption and mutual joy, Maurice came to believe, demands the reformation of society. In language which startled his contemporaries, he demanded that we put aside our selfish individualism and class pride, and embrace instead what he called Christian Socialism.

Maurice's politics were not as revolutionary as they may first appear; all he wanted is for rich and poor to co-operate so that Christ's love, poured out to all, might be made manifest by all to all. But when Headlam began to labour in the London slums he discovered that the wretchedness of the poor and the indifference of the rich made this genteel mutuality impossible. England, he became convinced, needed a social revolution. It would be peaceful, to be sure, ushered in by the ballot box, not the bullet. But it would be a revolution nonetheless, putting an end to the class system once and for all.

If Headlam's radicalism had stopped here, his devotion to Mary would have been little more than a charming eccentricity. Headlam, however, was a remarkable man and this was only the beginning. Politics, he understood, cannot forge the bonds of authentic community. Our fellowship with one another is a gift from God who has knit us together in Christ. And just as politics are not the ground of our fellowship, neither can just laws be its ultimate goal. Terrible as poverty and ignorance are, far worse is the spiritual desolation of



the bored and the hopeless. Some have said the people perish for lack of knowledge, Headlam observed; "it would be truer to say, the people perish for lack of beauty, joy, and pleasure."<sup>3</sup>

And where are these to be found? It was while living among the poor that Headlam discovered the answer, or rather two answers which no one before had ever joined together. All around him were ritualist parishes whose Anglo-Catholic priests, castigated by their bishop and denounced by the press, served the very people he was struggling to liberate. Their zeal and the beauty of their worship convinced Headlam that Catholic ceremonial embodies the bright vision of fellowship he had learned from Maurice. More important still, he believed that the Mass reveals the character of the beautiful God whose promise is that we shall have life and have it more abundantly.

But Catholic Christianity is only the first answer Headlam discovered; the second is the music hall. It seems an incongruous juxtaposition to us. To Bishop Jackson and just about all of Headlam's fellow clergy it seemed downright blasphemous. At a time when even the legitimate stage was regarded as morally suspect, the music hall was beyond the pale. Critics, ecclesiastical and otherwise, complained that the halls merely catered to their patrons' lust for alcohol, which was sold in great quantity, and for illicit sex, encouraged by the ballerinas' flesh-coloured tights and then sated by the prostitutes who plied their wares in the halls' ornate lobbies. Headlam admitted that there was some truth to these charges. But he insisted that whatever the faults of the halls might be, they were overshadowed by the laughter, songs, and dance which they brought to his over-worked parishioners. As for the flesh-coloured tights, Headlam's response was simple and direct. The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and "the poetry of [its] motion is the expression of unseen spiritual grace."<sup>4</sup>

This, Headlam argued, is the grace, the divinity if you will, which was poured out upon the Blessed Virgin Mary. And herein lies the reason that Headlam's devotion to Our Lady is so different from that of his more traditional and more lugubrious Anglo-Catholic brethren. Unlike them, he was not interested in the Virgin Birth. To be sure, he believed the doctrine. Indeed, in the light of Christ's character he thought it most natural. But he did not preach about it nor did he insist

that others accept it. One reason is that he was distressed by the way some Christians used the Virgin Birth to etherialize grace and so to denigrate sexual passion. The ascetic life is sacred, he wrote, but it is "not so high as the life of piping and dancing."<sup>5</sup>

More is at stake than our right to pleasure. The more we make a cult of Mary's virginity, the more likely we are to sunder the ties between Christ's humanity and our own. It is no coincidence, Headlam argued, that the same Puritans who turn their backs on earthly delights counsel the poor to accept their suffering as the price to be paid for the otherworldly reward awaiting them beyond the grave. To vindicate the dignity of both sexuality and society, Headlam embraced a daring strategy. Instead of proclaiming Mary's status as the virgin mother of God, he emphasized Christ's conception by the Holy Spirit. At first you may think that Headlam has only deepened the chasm between Christ and ourselves. But this, Headlam would argue, is only because we confuse the spiritual with the immaterial. Contrary to what pietists teach, it is precisely this divine conception which we creatures of flesh and blood share with Jesus, for every human being is both begotten sexually and conceived by the Holy Ghost who, the Nicene creed reminds us, is the Lord and giver of life.<sup>6</sup>

But if we do not revere Mary on account of her virginity, what is the basis of our devotion to her? Why, for example, should we say the Hail Mary regularly, as Headlam urged we do? The most obvious answer is that Mary brings us to Jesus. Contemplating our Lord's human mother, we more fully understand his divine humanity and the mystery of our own sanctification by grace. But this maternal transparency does not exhaust Mary's role as Christbearer. Her entire life reveals his character and his purpose. And nowhere is this clearer than in her glorious Magnificat, the song which Headlam, using the words of his friend and colleague, Thomas Hancock, called "the hymn of the universal social revolution" and "the Marseillaise of humanity."<sup>7</sup>

"Every nation has what is called its national hymn," Hancock observed, "but the Magnificat is the hymn of all peoples. It is the hymn of humanity, the hymn of all parishes." Proper church people refuse to believe this. They have conspired to spiritualize Mary's song. "Indeed," complained Hancock in words which have not lost their sting, "it is impossible to imagine anything more contrary to the

sort of hymn which would proceed from the Virgin of Lourdes, or the Virgin of La Salette,...or any other of those local Virgins to whose statues sound Conservatives and reactionists...are now going on pilgrimage. A Pope has declared that the Blessed Virgin is the great foe of Socialism. If the Magnificat be her song, it would be far more reasonable to call her the Mother of it."<sup>8</sup>

But if Mary speaks for the whole of oppressed humanity, Headlam would have us remember that she represents one section of that suffering multitude in particular: women like herself. Reverence for Mary should encourage reverence for all women. Headlam does not mean that we should offer sentimental obeisance to submissive wives and nurturing mothers, as many of his fellow Victorians did. If you want to understand Christian womanhood, he tells us, read the Gospel of Luke. Learn how women accompanied Jesus during his public ministry. Ponder the fact that it is Dorcas, the working woman, who is raised from the dead rather than Saint Stephen or Saint James the Apostle. It is no coincidence, Headlam believed, that England was awakening to Mary's importance at the very time when women were demanding the right to work, the right to an equal education with men, and the abolition of laws treating them as chattel.<sup>9</sup> To put in the ideologically bloated language of our own day, you cannot serve Mary and patriarchy.

Our Lady bears Christ to us, then, in her womb, in her prophetic longing for justice, and in the simplicity of her womanhood. But there is yet another way in which Mary brings us to Jesus, and that is in bringing us joy. For Headlam, you will recall, beauty, laughter, and dance are no mere luxuries. They are sacraments: tangible signs of divine grace which reveal the loving heart of God. How desperately England needs to know this truth, Headlam cried. Not only are working men and women being deprived of the pleasure God intends for them, but they have been taught that God himself hates earthly joy. Is it any wonder, Headlam asks, that ordinary folk reject the Church?

But Mary may yet turn the hearts of the Church and of the people back to the God of love. "The dark Calvinism which...has cast its slime over the English religion of the last three centuries," he declared one Good Friday, "is directly due to men having refused to let the Mother of God hold any appreciable place in their life and

imagination,” for Mary reveals God as “the source of joy and beauty, [and] the sanctifier of human affection.” To make this clear, Headlam offers us an image and a story. The image is that of a mother and her son. In their mutual affection and innocent joy there is a power strong enough to dispel the gloomy darkness of our popular Manicheanism. The story is the tale of Christ’s first miracle at Cana in Galilee. It is Mary, Headlam points out, the woman who bore the Son of God and rejoiced that the mighty would be torn down from their thrones, who asked Jesus to turn water into merry-making wine. What greater honour can those who love Mary bestow upon her, therefore, than to “teach the children of the workers to dance on Sunday...”?<sup>10</sup> And that dance will be their Magnificat and our own.

Headlam was sure of this, even though it scandalized respectable church folk, and probably still does. After a lecture in which he defended the music hall, an angry gentleman arose and asked him if he thought Saint Paul would have gone to a music hall. Summing up his faith in Christ and his love for Mary, Headlam replied, “I do not know what Saint Paul would have done. But I know our Lord would have gone, and taken his blessed mother with him.”<sup>11</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Frederick G Bettany *Stewart Headlam: A Biography* (London: John Murray, 1926). 63.
- 2 Stewart D Headlam *The Service of Humanity* (London: John Hodges, 1882), 55-56.
- 3 Ibid, 65.
- 4 Idem, *The Laws of Eternal Life* (London: F Verinder, 1888), 46.
- 5 *Church Reformer*, 1 June 1886, 140-141.
- 6 Headlam, *Laws*, 13.
- 7 See idem, *The Socialist’s Church* (London: George Allen, 1907), 20.
- 8 Hancock’s sermon, “The Hymn of the Universal Social Revolution,” can be found in the *Church Reformer*. 1 November 1886, 244-246.
- 9 See Headlam, *Service*, 8, 62-64.
- 10 See idem, “The Holy Rosary: an Address,” *Church Reformer*, 1 August 1891, 171-172; and idem, ‘Service’, 66.
- 11 See R Blackwell to John Jackson, 7 July 1879, Fulham Paper, Lambeth Palace Library.

Mary has long played a central and inspirational role for Christian socialists, not least since 1886 when Thomas Hancock, noticing that the Magnificat - "the hymn of universal social revolution" - was her hymn, called her the Mother of Socialism.

This pamphlet critically evaluates and recovers this important theological and political tradition while looking at new insights gathered from feminism, Marxism and non-European cultures and religions. It uses creative writing and poetry to relate our common human experience to the struggle and celebration at the depths of Marian doctrine and Christianity. It offers an important contribution to our thought about Mary.

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